

Portfolio 1: Oral History

What is Oral History?



“History is all around us, in our own families and communities, in the living memories and the experiences of older people. We have only to ask them and they can tell us enough stories to fill a library of books. This kind of history - that we all gather as we go through life - is called ORAL HISTORY.

Everyone has a story to tell about their life which is unique to them. Some people have been involved in momentous historical events like the Second World War, but many others haven't. Regardless of age or importance we all have interesting experiences to share.

Most importantly, historical documents and books can't tell us everything about our past. Often they concentrate on famous people and big events, and tend to miss out ordinary people talking about everyday events. They also neglect people on the margins of society - ethnic communities, disabled and unemployed people for example - whose voices have been hidden from history. Oral history fills in the gaps and gives us history which includes everyone. Unfortunately, because memories die when people do, if we don't record peoples' life histories they are lost forever” (Oral History Society).

Our Mission:

A group of individuals in our area—made up of researchers on campus, medical professionals, and community members—are working to set up a Rural Health and Wellness Collaborative. As Dr. Charles Harrington explains, the RHWC:

is a collaborative mission among University faculty, staff and students, tribal agencies and other community leaders to improve the health and well being of rural Southeastern North Carolinians, including the Lumbee Tribe. As partners, we will collaborate on research, outreach, education and engagement. (“UNCP Readies Native American Health Survey...”).

The goal of the collaborative is to “match UNCP’s talents and resources to critical community and rural health concerns” (“UNCP Readies Native American Health Survey...”) to improve health and wellness in our area.

YOUR time and talent are a valuable part of this process. By working together this semester, we can create an internet archive of approximately 200 oral histories providing personal perspectives on two research questions--What are local citizens' health needs? What are their experiences with accessing medical care and health/medical information?

Your goal here is not to gather information on your individual research topic (although, depending on the life experiences of the person you are interviewing, your research topic might come up). Instead, your mission is to help gather individual's accounts of the needs and concerns of area citizens. The oral histories you collect will provide researchers, grant writers, medical professionals, and other concerned parties with more information that will help better understand and meet the health and wellness needs of our neighbors.

For this assignment, then, you will locate one eligible and willing participant to interview, digitally audio record that interview, and then write a summary and timeline of the interview for use on the website.

Before the interview:

- 1) Locate an appropriate person to interview. They must be over the age of eighteen, must live in Scotland, Hoke, or Robeson County at least part of the year, and must access at least some of their medical care in these areas. This person can be a student, but cannot be enrolled in any course participating in this project.
- 2) Invite the individual you have identified to participate. Use the **recruitment script (Appendix A)** I've given you as a guide. Remember: participation is purely voluntary, and if an invited individual says no, you **must** accept no for an answer without lobbying or badgering the person to change their mind.
- 3) Make an appointment to meet your interview subject somewhere quiet and comfortable for both of you. Often the best choice is their home, but if you (or they) are uncomfortable with this, suggest another, more public, location. (Be careful of background noise though.... Restaurants and the like generally do not work well. You could meet in one of the group-work rooms in the library, or the like, with good results.) The interview should take between one and two hours.

The Interview:

- 1) Arrive on time. Set up your audio equipment. Have your list of questions, a notepad, and a pen/cil handy.
- 2) Take two copies of the **informed consent form (Appendix B)** with you.
 - a. Give your interview subject a copy of the informed consent document and talk through it with them.
 - b. Answer any questions they have. If they have questions you can't answer, direct them to Dr. Lackey or Dr. Timothy Hayes. (Contact information for both is on the consent form.)
 - c. The interview subject must sign the form for us to use their interview, BUT they can stop the interview at any time, and can even have their interview removed from the website down the road, if they wish.
 - d. Leave one copy of the informed consent document with the interviewee, and keep a signed copy to hand in with your interview.
- 3) Check to make sure your audio equipment is functioning. (You might even rewind a bit and listen to check the sound quality. Make adjustments as necessary. Begin your interview!
- 4) Some reminders about consent and confidentiality:
 - a. your interviewee has consented to have the interview taped, but they may have chosen a pseudonym. Be sure to use this for them throughout the interview.
 - b. Also: the interviewee may wish to mention others—doctors, family members, etc.—by name during the interview. We do NOT have those individuals' permission to use their names on our website.
 - c. Just before you begin, remind the interviewee that they can use a pseudonym for themselves throughout, and they MUST use pseudonyms (or no name at all) for anyone else they mention.
- 5) Consider the **list of questions (Appendix C)** a guide, NOT a script. In other words, try to ask these questions in your own words, rather than just reading from the page. Further, these are not ALL the questions you'll need to ask to have a good interview. A few tips:
 - ➔ Be flexible about what order you ask questions in. If you plan on asking something later, and your interviewee gets near that subject now, stay with it. Mark off questions as you go, so you'll remember to come back to unasked questions.
 - ➔ When introducing a topic, ask open-ended questions—questions that seek details and examples, not just yes or no answers.
 - ➔ Ask specific follow-up questions to follow up on the details, so we capture rich stories full of information, and so we fully understand the lessons arising from this person's life experiences.
 - ➔ Be non-judgmental. (Sometimes, for example, we might simply ask "why" as a follow-up question. We ask hoping to get more details, but this can be misunderstood as a judgmental question—like "why on earth would you do that?!" Be careful how you phrase things and clarify your meaning, if necessary.)
 - ➔ Be curious, and have a real conversation! (Again: ask follow-up questions!)
 - ➔ Remember confidentiality as you go! Don't use, or allow the interview subject to use, the names of people who aren't there to consent, or to defend themselves.

- 6) Discussing difficult times in our lives can be upsetting. If the person you are interviewing seems to be suffering from psychological stress because of this interview, please very sensitively suggest they contact the primary investigator, Dr. Dundee Lackey, so I can help them find appropriate counseling resources on campus or in the local community.
- 7) Before you leave: Be sure to sincerely THANK the person you have interviewed for their time. Tell them how the time they spent giving this interview can benefit their community. Remind them that they can contact the primary investigator at any time to ask questions, give us feedback, or withdraw their interview from the website.

Turning it in:

You will need a thoughtful, fairly well polished draft of your summary by September 20th, so make sure you have your interview scheduled in time to produce this.

On Tuesday, September 27th, you will hand in:

- 1) the audio file of the interview AND a written overview of the interview, burned to CD or DVD. YOU MUST ALSO HAND IN AT THAT TIME THE ORIGINAL, SIGNED "INFORMED CONSENT" DOCUMENT.
- 2) a reflective overview on this process. The reflective overview should be emailed to me (as an attachment) before class on the due date.

This portfolio is worth, collectively, 25% of your final course grade. The interview, summary, and consent form will be worth 10% of the portfolio grade; the reflection will be worth 15%. Because this work will be published online for a professional readership, I will weight clarity and correctness heavily in evaluating the interview summary.

1. Transferring the audio file

If your digital audio recorder has a USB port:

- There should be an instruction sheet with your recorder walking you through this, but generally you will install the software that came with the recorder (if any) and then simply connect the cable to your computer to transfer the file.
- Name the file: yourunupid_intervieweeName. (Mine would be named dcl009_johnsmith).
- Pay attention to the file name and where the file is being placed on your computer, so you can find it later!
- TRY THIS PROCESS OUT AHEAD OF TIME with a short "dummy" file so I can help you troubleshoot any problems.

If your digital audio recorder does NOT have a USB port OR if you are using a tape recorder:

- Get a cable to connect the DAR or tape recorder to your computer. Generally, you will need a 3.5 mm male-to-male connector, but double check the size against your devices. These cables are *cheap* (generally in the \$3-5 range) and available in the electronics section of many stores. WalMart, Radio Shack, and the like should carry them. You can also find them online. (DON'T WAIT UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE TO GET ONE.)
- Download a program to help you capture the file on the computer. One free option is Audacity, available at: <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>. Download it, and then click on the downloaded file to install.
- Connect one end of the cable to the headphone input on your recorder. Connect the other to the sound input, or microphone, jack on your computer.
- Open Audacity on your computer. In the top right hand corner, there is a drop down box where you can choose the input source. Choose "microphone."

- Press record in the Audacity window. Press play on the recorder. You **should** both hear and see the file playing. If you don't, adjust the input source until you do.
- Audacity will take as long to capture the file as the file takes to play. 😊 (Use this time to work on a draft of your summary.)
- When it's done playing, we're going to save the file two ways.
 - The first time, we'll save this as an Audacity file. This will ONLY open in Audacity—so this is a big file, and isn't how you'll want to turn this in. You might, though, need to open the file in Audacity again for editing.
 - To save the raw Audacity file: click "file" (top left, in the menu bar.) Next, click "save project as." Name the file: yourunqid_intervieweeName. (Mine would be named dcl000_johnsmith).
 - Next, you'll export this file as an MP3. THIS is the file you'll burn to disk and hand in.
 - To export, click "file," then "export as MP3."
 - IF this doesn't work, you may need to download and install a "LAME" file. Download it from: <http://lame.sourceforge.net/>. Install it, and then try exporting again.
- TRY THIS PROCESS OUT AHEAD OF TIME with a short "dummy" file. If you have any trouble, let me know. I can (and will, if it's needed) make a more detailed handout.

2. Writing a Summary of the Interview

You will hand in with the audio file of the interview a written summary of the interview. You will want to provide some basic information about the interview, a written summary of the interview, and a timeline. There is a sample summary provided (Appendix D).

3. Burning the files to disk

You will hand the MP3 file of your interview and your written summary in on compact disk. (This is because the MP3 file may be too large to easily be emailed, and because the collaborative needs a permanent, offline archive of all files.)

Here are two ways to burn files to CD:

- Windows XP: <http://www.ofzenandcomputing.com/zanswers/151>
- Mac OS X: <http://www.wikihow.com/Burn-a-CD-Using-Mac-OS-X>

Explore this process BEFORE the last minute, so if you have problems I can help you troubleshoot!

Label the CD with your name and email address, and the name of (or pseudonym used by) the person you interviewed. (For example: Dundee Lackey dcl000@bravemail.uncp.edu – John Smith).

4. Your Reflective Overview

In a critical, thoughtful, and carefully edited reflection of approximately five pages, explain your work and learning on the project. As we approach the end of this portfolio period, I will help you develop a list of prompts to guide you in considering various aspects of oral history project. In general, though:

The purpose of a reflective document is to explain to your readers your work and learning (considering both processes and products). This piece is meant to help you demonstrate your performance as a learner/researcher/writer, but also to help your reader understand the kinds of work, engagement and learning that you went through.

Report on and evaluate the different processes you used in various parts/stages of each assignment, explore what and how you learned, and evaluate whether what you've done/learned will be (or not be) useful to you (for this class and

others, and in your day-to-day life). Remember to be more than descriptive about your work—be reflective and analytical. Explain the text(s) you've created. How? Why? What works? What doesn't?

Include a section in your reflective overview that serves as self-assessment. Based on the expectations for the project/the course, what grade do you think it should earn, and why? Please list concrete reasons (from the critical thinking and information literacy skills rubrics, which we'll be working with this term; the goals of the course; and/or from the rubric for the current writing project) explaining why this grade is appropriate.

Because it is such an important piece of writing, this reflective overview will be the result of multiple drafts and peer review. It will represent careful, college level writing. It is more than a description. It is also an analysis and an evaluation. One way to think of the purpose of your overview is to persuade readers that your performance for the period of the project should be evaluated in a certain way, earning a certain grade, with ample reasons to support your claims. Obviously, with this much to accomplish, the overview is important. Effective overviews will be carefully developed, well organized, and clear.

Works Cited

Oral History Society. "Practical Advice." *Oral History Society*. Oral History Society. June 2009. Web. 11 Oct. 2009. <http://www.ohs.org.uk/advice/index.php>.

"UNCP Readies Native American Health Survey for Release." University Newswire, University of North Carolina at Pembroke. Web. 11 Oct. 2010. http://uncp.edu/news/2010/events/health_survey.htm.